

Pre-Leibnizian Moral Necessity

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Even casual readers of Leibniz's most widely read works are often struck by the tensions in his doctrine of freedom. His commitment, for example, to the Principle of Sufficient Reason seems to require that he acknowledge the compatibility of freedom and necessity. And yet just when one expects Leibniz to make this point explicitly, he seems to hedge by asserting that while antecedent conditions might make a particular choice "certain" or "infallible," they do not necessitate it, as in the following,

And although the soul's present actions are a natural and certain consequence of its preceding state, they are not a necessary consequence. It is rather like the way knowledge of the greatest good makes us choose it, by inclining the soul but not necessitating it.¹

To say that Leibniz is less than forthcoming about exactly what he means by "inclination without necessitation" or, in the later works, "moral necessity" is an understatement. But it is no understatement to say that scholars have generally held that moral necessity is, at best, deployed by Leibniz as subterfuge, attempting to cover up or obscure his commitment to some variety or other of ordinary compatibilism.²

Those who undertake to figure out exactly what Leibniz is up to when using the phrase "moral necessity" must be careful to note that he employs the phrase in two quite different contexts, with two quite different meanings. In his earlier writings, Leibniz uses the phrase "moral necessity" in strictly deontic contexts. For example, when he writes, "I call *morally impossible* that which it is not possible to do without committing a sin" and "*Obligation* . . . is a moral necessity—that is, a necessity imposed in him who wants to

¹ Letter to Jacquesot, from R. S. Woolhouse and Richard Francks (eds.), *Leibniz's New System and Associated Texts*, Oxford: Clarendon, 1997, p.179.

² See, for example, Robert Adams. *Leibniz: Determinist, Theist, Idealist*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995, pp.21-2; Robert C. Sleigh, Jr., "Determinism and Freedom," in *The Cambridge History of Seventeenth Century Philosophy*, Daniel Garber (ed.). New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

keep the name of ‘a good man’” he is using moral necessity as an ethical concept.³ But after 1700, Leibniz clearly begins to deploy the phrase in action theoretic contexts. Thus in the *Theodicy* Leibniz uses moral necessity to describe the sense in which the will is bound to choose that course of action which the practical intellect judges here and now to be best. Clearly this is different from the deontic use since in this context, the agent’s judgment of what is best to choose here and now might necessitate the agent’s sinning! Thus, Leibniz can attribute moral necessity to the actions of both the beatified and the devil, and indeed he does, “it is [morally] necessary that the blessed not sin; that the devils and the damned should sin; that God himself should choose the best; that man should follow the course of action which attracts him most.”⁴ It is this second sense that Leibniz utilizes when he is trying to show how an agent inevitably chooses the perceived best while still retaining robust freedom and it is this second sense that is the focus of this paper.

Focusing our attention on Leibniz’s texts would, I claim, provide us with sufficient evidence that, as Leibniz deploys it, moral necessity is not mere subterfuge, but rather a concept that does some serious philosophical work. However, the focus of this paper will not be the Leibnizian texts. Instead, I would like to turn our attention towards that tradition on which I claim Leibniz was drawing when he comes to appropriate the

³ The following abbreviations are used when citing Leibniz’s works: *A*: *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe. German Academy of Sciences*. Darmstadt and Berlin: Berlin Academy, 1923-; *AG*: Gottfried Leibniz. *Philosophical Essays*. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber, trans. and eds. Indianapolis: Hackett, 1989, *Grua*: Gottfried Leibniz. *Textes Inédits*. Gaston Grua, editor. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948; *NE*: Gottfried Leibniz. *New Essays on Human Understanding*. Peter Remnant and Jonathan Bennett, trans. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1982. *T*: *Theodicy*. Gottfried Leibniz. E.M. Huggard trans. New York: Open Court, 1952. Cited by section number as well as the page number in volume VI of C.I. Gerhardt’s *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz*. Berlin: Weidman, 1875-1890. The two texts cited here are from A.4.i.471 and Grua 608. The translations are from Robert Adams, 1995:22.

⁴ T §282. In the correspondence with Des Bosses Leibniz is called to account for these remarks. There he seems to back down from them. But there is no reason for him to back down since, even in these later works Leibniz consistently identifies moral necessity as the relevant modality when explaining the sense in which the will is bound to choose in accordance with that which the practical intellect judges to be best here and now.

action theoretic use of the phrase. As we will see, it is quite clear that there *is* such a tradition stretching back just beyond the dawn of the seventeenth century.

The paper will proceed by investigating the way in which two guiding principles drove certain philosophical and theological developments—developments that merged in the seventeenth century in a way that made moral necessitarianism attractive. While these principles are quite different, they both share something in common, namely, a commitment to rejecting the existence of bruteness in the universe. After a discussion of these two principles I will explore the evolution of moral necessitarianism during the seventeenth century, showing how these two guiding principles drove moral necessitarians to further refine the doctrine. Although my focus will not be directly on Leibniz, I will, along the way, show that Leibniz is committed to the two guiding principles which culminated in moral necessitarianism, and that his deployment of the concept parallels that of the moral necessitarians in important respects.

Ia. The Metaphysical Anti-Bruteness Principle

In the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century an important dispute emerged about the nature of human freedom that would ripple forward well into the seventeenth century. Although the dispute can be cast in various ways, for my purposes it will be useful to cast it as a dispute over a certain principle concerning the existence of metaphysical bruteness in nature. The principle plays a central role on the developments of the views of freedom described by St. Thomas, on the one hand, and Thomas' critics on the other.

The principle in question is fundamental to Thomistic metaphysics, and to the Aristotelianism from which it derives. According to this principle, the reduction of a power from potency to act can only occur by something already in act (in the relevant respect). This principle, which we can call the “no absolute self-motion principle” or NASP, plays a central role in Thomas' discussion of free choice. Among other things, it provides the backdrop for the discussion of the movement of the will in Question Nine of

the *Prima Secundae*. The six articles which make up the question, in fact, aim to show how the motion of the will in choice does not violate the principle with respect to the specification (aa.1-2) and exercise (aa.3-6) of the will's act. The principle appears in the first line of the *Responsio* of the first article of the question, and drives the discussion throughout.

NASP is important because it presents Thomas with the challenge of explaining how the will can maintain a level of independence or autonomy sufficient to render the choice of the will free. That is, when it comes to the question of what accounts for the will's reduction from potency to act, the principle demands that there be some answer. However it seems that any answer is going to jeopardize the autonomy, and thus the freedom, of the will. Thomas recognizes the tension and proposes a variety of strategies for circumventing it, though none of them are successful, even by his own standards, since none of them coherently safeguards the needed autonomy of the will. In spite of this, Thomas remarkably never considers surrendering the principle which buys him so many difficulties.

The focal point of the difficulties concerns the explanation of *volition*. To grasp the problem, we will need to recall an important distinction that Thomas employs in his account of free action: the distinction between exercise and specification of the act of a faculty. All contemporary commentators recognize that Thomas employs this distinction in his later works, but there is quite good evidence that, in fact, he implicitly utilized the distinction much earlier.⁵ The relevant distinction amounts to this. When a faculty is

⁵See, for example, *De Veritate* (DV) Q.22, a.6 where Thomas at least distinguishes between the will's ability to "will or not will" and its ability to "will this or that." This, in fact, is the very distinction later made explicitly between exercise and specification. Although Thomas does not put it to as much work in earlier texts such as DV, he clearly holds here, as he does in later works, that the ability to "pass or not pass into the act of willing" belongs to the will, while the ability to determine the particular good to be willed lies in the power of the intellect (see DV Q.22, a.12, resp., Q.24, a.2, resp., and a.9, resp.). Mark Jordan, as one example, holds that the distinction is not in play for St. Thomas until the writing of the *Prima Secundae*, where the actual terminology is introduced. See, "The Transcendentality of Goodness and the Human Will," in *Being and Goodness*, Scott MacDonald (ed.), Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991, pp.140-1.

reduced from potency to act, two things must be explained. First, there must be an explanation of the fact that the faculty moves from inactivity to activity. Second, there must be an explanation of the fact that the faculty is activated in this way rather than some other way in which it can be activated. When explaining why I am looking at the Monet, I must explain why I am *seeing* rather than *not* (i.e., because I chose to open my eyes) and why I am looking at *this* rather than *that* (i.e., because I directed my gaze, thus and so). The former is the explanation of the exercise of my power of sight, the latter is the explanation of the specification my power of sight. Because of NASP, Thomas thinks that both exercise and specification require explanations, even when the faculty in question is the will, and the act in question is volition. Unfortunately, it seems that such explanations of exercise and specification in the case of volition, serve to undermine the autonomy and thus the freedom of the will.

From the time Thomas introduces the distinction between exercise and specification into his account, he consistently holds both that the exercise of the will lies directly in the power of the will, and that specification of the will (in the act of choice) derives from the intellect which, as a result of practical deliberation, proposes a particular act to it. Let's consider these in turn.

It should raise eyebrows to discover that Thomas held that the will moves *itself* with respect to exercise since such a view seems so baldly inconsistent with NASP. Thomas is aware of this problem and, when push comes to shove, he agrees that, strictly speaking, the will is not "absolutely self-moved." In fact, just after he finishes defending the will's self-movement with respect to exercise in Question Nine of the *Prima Secundae* articles one through three, he goes on to argue that the will is not an absolute self-mover, since some "exterior principle" must account for the fact that the will moves from potency to act on a particular occasion. Article six informs us this exterior principle is none other than God himself.

As noted, specification is determined by the deliverances of practical deliberation. Through deliberation the intellect forms a practical judgment that one course of action is best here and now, and this judgment serves to explain specification in the case of volition.

In what sense is the will autonomous and free on this account, according to which exercise and specification are determined by God and the practical intellect, respectively? Thomas recognized that this question required an answer. And throughout his writings he tries out a variety of strategies aimed at giving a satisfactory answer to the question. I take there to be five distinguishable strategies which Thomas attempts to work out. All of the strategies aim to explain how the will can be autonomous in a way that preserves freedom, while at the same time not running afoul of NASP.

It seems to me that none of these strategies is ultimately successful. And the shift in Thomas' own writing from one to another indicates, I think, that he did not find any to them ultimately satisfying either. Each of them fall prey to just the sorts of objections you might expect in the case of someone who endorses NASP, namely, various sorts of vicious determinism or vicious regresses.⁶

But it is also interesting to note that these different strategies tend to reappear in the succeeding centuries, being defended by one or another category of philosophers or theologians who, like Thomas, were wedded to NASP or principles like it. In fact, one might profitably read the scholastic disputes over freedom from the fourteenth through the seventeenth centuries as disputes between critics of NASP, and defenders of one or the other of these five strategies.

⁶ The vicious determinism part is easy to understand. The vicious regress worry comes about when defenders of NASP try to secure the autonomy of the will by arguing that the will exercises indirect control when, for example, it exercises direct control over the course of deliberation that results in the last practical judgment. The regress worry arises when one asks for the explanation for the fact that the will directs the course of deliberation in one way rather than another. Defenders of NASP will claim that some prior judgment on the part of the intellect is a necessary condition, even for this act of directing deliberation. This gets the worrisome regress off and running.

I cannot fully develop the five strategies in this essay.⁷ However, I would like to consider one briefly. This strategy is important for our purposes since it is the one which ultimately evolves into moral necessitarianism. To understand this strategy requires that we first get clear on some background. Thomas holds that each of the faculties involved in human choice tend towards, or exhibit a conatus for, one of two transcendentals, the Good and the True. For the will, it is a tendency towards the Good, and for the intellect it is a tendency toward the True. Since created goods vary in their degree of (perceived) goodness, and propositions differ in the degree of the evidentness of their truth, the inclination of the will towards perceived goods and the inclination of the intellect toward considered truths varies accordingly. These inclinings reach their “upper limit” when the faculties are in the presence of objects or propositions that exemplify goodness and truth in the maximal way. Thus, when the intellect grasps first principles, it is necessary that it assent to them, and when the will is in the presence of absolute goodness, that is, God, it is necessary that it love such goodness.⁸

Since the role of the will is to incline (and then to choose) the good, it is not surprising to find Thomas claiming that, in choice, the will chooses that good which is judged “best” among the means considered. But this fact seems immediately to threaten the freedom of the will’s choice. After all, if the will is not able, on its own, to select among alternatives, in what sense is it to be regarded as autonomous or free? How does Aquinas meet this charge?

In his earlier works, there are a number of passages which might lead the casual reader to assume that Thomas simply bites the bullet and endorses intellectual determinism at this juncture. For example,

⁷ A summary of the four views not discussed here can be found in note 12.

⁸ST IaIIae Q.10 a.1 ad 2; ST Ia Q.82 a.2 resp.; IaIIae Q.10 a.1 resp

What precedes in order of generation and time is less perfect: for in one and in the same thing potentiality precedes act, and imperfection precedes perfection. But what precedes absolutely and in the order of nature is more perfect: for thus act precedes potentiality. And in this way the intellect precedes the will, as the motive power precedes the thing movable, and as the active precedes the passive; for good which is understood moves the will.⁹

Here the will is portrayed simply as a passive power in choice. But there are a number of passages which signal that the account is more complicated than this. And this is where the five freedom-preserving strategies come into our picture.

Ib. The Inclination/Multiple Means Account of Freedom

In some of his early works Thomas claims that the will is inclined towards particular goods since, in virtue of its nature as a faculty of the rational soul, its proper object is universal goodness (and not any particular good). As a result, while it is necessary that the will choose only those things which are presented to it *sub ratione boni*, the will is not necessitated to love or choose any finite good since, the will can only be necessitated by Goodness-full-stop. The result is that the will is indeterminately related to these numerous created goods. Thus, Aquinas says,

The higher appetite, the will . . . tends directly to *the very reason for appetibility itself* in an absolute way. Thus the will tends primarily and principally to *goodness itself*, or utility, or something of the kind. It tends to *this or that appetible thing*, however, secondarily, inasmuch as such a thing shares in the above mentioned feature. This is because a rational nature has a capacity so great that an inclination to one determinate thing would not be sufficient for it. . . . [Thus] the will is under necessity in regard to goodness and utility themselves (for man of necessity wills good), but it is not under any necessity in regard to this or that particular thing, however much it may be apprehended as good or useful.¹⁰

This “inclination without necessitation” strategy is, as we will see, developed in important ways in the later tradition. But it is hard to see how it will be of much help to Thomas here. The deterministic pressures on his view come not from the fact that some

⁹ ST Ia Q.82 a.3 ad2.

¹⁰DV Q.25 a.1 resp.

particular good is able to necessitate the will in virtue of the nature of the will. Instead, the determinism seems to arise because the intellect, in presenting one means as the best here and now *de facto* precludes the will's capacity to choose any alternative means. As a rational appetite (for the good) the will is bound to choose only those means which are represented as good, and *de facto* wills only those goods that are represented as best here and now. And choice seems to require that only one such means be so represented.

Thus, while there may be a number of means which *can be* represented as good, and many of the means might even have been represented as best here and now, the fact that only one *is* so represented, seems to preclude the will's ability to choose differently.

To rescue autonomy and freedom on this view agents would have to possess the ability to *control the outcome* of deliberation. Since the will can only choose that which is represented as best, we must, in order to have control over our actions, likewise have control over how the intellect forms its practical judgments, and specifically over how it judges some alternative to be "best here and now." Thomas recognizes this fact and explicitly holds that without "freedom in judging" we are no different than brutes.¹¹

Development of this line of thought, however, takes us in the direction of another strategy which we will have to leave to one side here.¹²

In the century after Thomas' death, Franciscans mounted a vigorous response to his views, arguing that none of the proposed strategies worked, and that freedom could only be salvaged by surrendering NASP. This view, while standard fare among Franciscans in the period, is most often attributed to Scotus. Scotus' view of the will is

¹¹DV Q.24 a.2, resp.

¹² This strategy is pursued by St. Thomas in, for example ST Ia Q.82 a.4. On this view, the will maintains autonomy by controlling the outcome of practical deliberation. The three remaining strategies are as follows. First, in at least one early work, Thomas argues that freedom is safeguarded against NASP in virtue of the fact that we are able to form judgments about our own judgments (see for example, DV Q.24, a.2, resp.; see also *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Bk. 2, c.48). Second, Thomas sometimes argues that the intellect and will simultaneously and mutually reduce each other from potency to act in volition, thereby deflating worries about intellectual determinism (see for example, DV Q.24, a.6, ad 5). Finally, St. Thomas sometimes seems to argue that the freedom of the will in exercise is sufficient for retaining autonomy and freedom (see for example, ST Ia IIae Q.10, a.5, resp.).

much like that of many contemporary libertarians. Later scholastics would characterize the view as one according to which the will can, with respect to a particular object, will, fail to will, or will the contrary, even when all the necessary conditions for forming an act of will are in place. On this view, completion of deliberation on the part of the intellect is not necessary for choice. Thus, unlike Thomas, Scotus holds that the will can be reduced from potency to act without any other power effecting the reduction. NASP is false, and indeed must be if there is to be genuine creaturely freedom. Creaturely freedom requires the reality of absolute self-movers in the created realm. Thus, unlike “natural” agents which must be reduced from potency to act by some external determining agent, the will has a “superabundant sufficiency” which allows it to effect its own reduction.¹³ For Scotus, the obvious truth that we possess such self-moving powers leads him to scoff at the belief that NASP could be regarded by anyone (as it was by St. Thomas) as a metaphysical first principle.¹⁴

What is important here, however, is to see that Thomas and his followers are keen to exclude the possibility of bruteness. If a power is to be reduced from potency to act, something must suffice for the reduction. And in particular, that something must consist in the existence of some other substance or power of a substance that is already in act in the relevant respect. What we have in NASP then is a proto-Principle of Sufficient Reason.

II. The Semantic Anti-Bruteness Principle

In the sixteenth century Jesuits and Dominicans divided over the nature of divine providence. Although there are various ways of understanding the dispute, one way of characterizing it is in terms of a dispute over another anti-bruteness principle, in this case

¹³*Questiones in Metaphysicam IX*, q.15.

¹⁴ Scotus makes his scorn for the view clearly felt at *Ibid.*, q.14, n.23. For an extended discussion of Scotus’ rejection of NASP see Roy Effler’s *John Duns Scotus and the Principle ‘Omne Quod movetur ab alio movetur’* St. Bonaventure, NY: Franciscan Institute, 1962.

a semantic principle. According to this principle, every true proposition requires grounds which are sufficient to necessitate the truth of the proposition. This truthmaking principle, much under discussion today, served to raise important tensions in pre-seventeenth century theology because of the issues it raised for divine providence. The central issue was this. Complete providential control requires that God know the actual future. But such simple foreknowledge fails to confer genuine control since, in virtue of the fact that certain events fall under simple foreknowledge, their occurrence is inevitable. Rather, what is required for control is comprehensive knowledge of what would occur under every possible creation scenario God might actualize. In order to have such knowledge, God must be able to know what, for example, Adam would choose to do if created with Eve in the Garden of Eden. But he also must be able to know what would be chosen by Hamlet if created with Ophelia in the Land of Nod. By way of knowledge of these conditionals God can consider exactly how each world he might create would unfold.

Of course, having such knowledge requires that the propositions known be true. And if the truthmaking principle is correct, something must make these propositions true. Such truthmaking is easy to come by when one considers conditional propositions describing events in the world which are nomically necessary. What, for example, is required to make it true that were the stone to be released, it would fall? In this sort of case, the obtaining of certain initial conditions and of certain laws will suffice. In light of such considerations, everyone in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was aware of the fact that complete providential control over human action would be easy if human actions are nomically necessitated. Suarez for example, remarks,

[When free choice is being defended, authors] are talking about freedom not only insofar as it is opposed to coercion, but also insofar as it excludes a necessity in operating. Otherwise, they would not have struggled to reconcile freedom with grace, providence, and predestination, since it is utterly obvious that the things we do by our will we do spontaneously and without coercion. Rather the problem could only have to do with an indifference in operating. Thus, it is in defending this indifference and in harmonizing it with God's grace and moving action that they work so hard.¹⁵

Thus when we rule out nomic necessitation as the truthmaking grounds for these conditionals of freedom, and thus of God's knowledge of such conditionals, what candidates for grounds are left? The truthmaking principle requires that something make the proposition true. But anything that would suffice to make the proposition true would, it seems, undercut creaturely freedom. Why? Because, the only candidate for a truthmaker seems to be the antecedent of the conditional (or the state of affairs picked out by the antecedent, i.e., the circumstances immediately preceding the choice) and some other fact or law or principle which, conjoined with the antecedent, entails the consequent (or necessitates the state of affairs, i.e., the free choice, picked out by the consequent).

Most Dominicans argued that these conditionals require truthmakers, and that the truthmaker consists in a possible act of the divine will. On their view, were Peter to be situated in such and such circumstances, Peter would freely ϕ in virtue of the fact that God would simultaneously will that Peter ϕ in those circumstances.¹⁶ Jesuits typically argued that the any such truthmakers would undermine creaturely freedom since anything

¹⁵*Disputationes Metaphysicae*, 19.2.12. The translation is from *On Efficient Causality: Metaphysical Disputations 17, 18, and 19*. Alfred Freddoso (trans.). New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994, p.291.

¹⁶ See, for example, Francisco Zumel, *Variarum disputationum tomus secundus ad Primam Secundae S. Thomae*. Lyon, 1609, p.15.

that would suffice to make the conditional true would thereby undercut creaturely freedom.

III. The Emergence of Moral Necessity

One way to understand the emergence of moral necessitarianism as it is applied to human action at the beginning of the seventeenth century is as an attempt to resolve the difficulties over the two anti-bruteness principles. In particular, two Spanish Jesuits, Diego Ruiz de Montoya and his student Diego Granado were keen to maintain the two anti-bruteness principles, while trying to evade the apparent threats of control-defeating determinism noted by Scotus, and the freedom-defeating truthmaking concerns noted by the Jesuits.

The difficulties facing the Thomistic view of freedom were clear. Any plausible defense of the view would have to show how one could avoid a vicious form of determinism on the one hand, and the vicious infinite regress on the other. How might this be done? The way pursued by the Moral Necessitarians was to revisit the “inclination strategy” deployed by St. Thomas and described above. Recall that Thomas held that the proper object of the will is Goodness-full-stop, and that only this proper object can necessitate the will’s operation. Created or participated goods merely incline the will with a strength proportional to the degree of goodness judged to be in them. In light of this, one might argue that if a certain created good is presented by the intellect as best, this object might be inevitably chosen even though the choice would not be necessitated. One might object here that if the will infallibly chooses the last practical judgment, then it is hard to see how the relationship could be anything other than causally deterministic. As a result, the view appears to fall back on one of the two horns of the dilemma proposed by Thomistic critics. Moral Necessitarians argued that the dilemma is a false one, proposing instead to: i) affirm that the will does infallibly follow the last practical judgment but also ii) deny that the last practical judgment *causally determines* the choice of the will. They described the modality governing the relationship between last practical judgment and choice as *necessitas moralis*, moral necessity.

Ruiz and Granado took inspiration for the view from strands within the Dominican and Jesuit positions on providence to argue that such a relationship between the practical judgment of the intellect and choice of the will could further solve the semantic bruteness problem concerning those conditionals which God deploys in the exercise of providence. Both Dominicans and Jesuits had already acknowledged the possibility that God could determine the choice of the will in two different ways: directly, that is, by directly causing a creature's volition, and indirectly, by inducing powerful motives in the will of the creature which in turn bring about the volition. The Jesuit Suarez, for example, puts the point as follows:

I hold that it is possible to conceive of two ways in which God might move the will to some act; one way is by moral means or *ex parte obiecto*, by proposing the object and the reasons for loving or rejecting it. . . . the other is by moving it physically through a proper and immediate effect in the will itself.¹⁷

Dominicans and other Thomists also believed that God could move the will in these ways. In fact, such a position fits in more naturally with a Thomistic view according to which a last practical judgment suffices to reduce the will from potency to volition. In light of this, it is equally possible for God to secure the volition of the will by introducing these powerful motives. And in this direction we find Bellarmine saying that,

God inclines the will not efficiently, but objectively (*obiective*), through an internal persuasion by proposing the object in an efficacious manner, so that it is not possible for the will to resist because of this efficacious persuasion, and so in this way God would necessitate [the will], if he were to so act, but only morally since we cannot be necessitated metaphysically by the object.¹⁸

However, while all sides agreed that God could, and sometimes did, act in one or the other of these two ways, neither believed that these were the fundamental mechanisms of providence. Why not? First, the direct mechanism, while effective, would undermine creaturely freedom. Second, and more importantly here, in those cases where God moves the will indirectly, by induced motives, there would be insufficient grounds for divine

¹⁷Suarez, *Opuscula Varia Theologicae*, Opusculum I, Book II, c.2, n.3, 1599, p. 93b.

¹⁸Xavier-Marie LeBachelet, *Auctarium Bellarminianum: supplément aux Oeuvres du Cardinal Bellarmin*, Paris: Gabriel Beauchesne, 1913, p.89.

knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom. Specifically, the problem, they claimed, is that truthmakers of this sort are unable to guarantee the truth of the corresponding conditional in a way sufficient to provide God with the unconditional certainty required for the exercise of providence. Zumel summarizes the problem as follows:

The totality of moral motives do not present a ground of infallibility in such a way that [knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom] are not subject to possible falsity, nor do they support an infallible cognition with more than merely moral certitude.¹⁹

As a result, Thomists argued that divine knowledge of these conditionals must be grounded in the knowledge of God's premotion provided in each creaturely act.²⁰ The Jesuits, on the other hand, either rejected the truthmaking condition altogether, or made vague references to grounding the conditionals in God's "supercomprehension."²¹ These Jesuits went so far as to posit a new category of divine knowledge, namely middle knowledge, to accommodate the ungrounded conditionals. The Jesuit Bernaldo de Quiros, expresses the point as follows,

The knowledge of God which depends on such factors . . . is insufficient for metaphysical certainty concerning the futuration of our acts . . . thus God cannot preconceive the precise force of such factors independently of his middle knowledge.²²

Even Ruiz himself admits that were moral motives insufficient to necessitate choice, God would have to rely on middle knowledge in the exercise of his providence.

However this knowledge (of future conditionals of freedom) would not suffice to predefine those acts which are not only physically but even morally free; these would require middle knowledge.²³

¹⁹ Francisco Zumel, *Variarum disputationum tomus secundus ad Primam Secundae S. Thomae*. Lyon, 1609, p.18. See also pp.185 and, making the same charge specifically against the moral necessitarians (directed at an apparently an unpublished manuscript by Ruiz), p.211. In addition see Bernardo Aldrete, S.J. *Commentariorum et disputationum in primam partem D. Thomae*, Lyon, 1662, Vol.1, p.584b.

²⁰ This is the view taken by Zumel in *ibid*, pp.15, 17.

²¹ For example, see Molina's infamous appeal to divine supercomprehension at *Commentaria in primam D. Thomae partem, in duos tomos divisa*. q. 14. a. 13. d. 15, Cuenca:1592.

²² Bernaldo de Quiros, *Selectae Disputationes theologicae de predestinatione, trinitate, et angelis*. Lyon 1658, p.34.

²³ *Commentaria ac Disputationes ad quaestionem XXII et bonam partem quaestionis XXIII ex prima parte S. Thomae: De providentia dei*, Lyon 1631, Tract. II, Disp. VII, sect. 1. The alternatives to reliance on moral motives as truthmakers, that is, Thomistic premotion and Jesuit bruteness, are clearly laid out by

Ruiz and Granado were undeterred by such worries. It was their view that moral motives morally necessitating the choice of the will explains both how free choice can avoid running afoul of NASP while at the same time providing appropriate truthmaking grounds for the conditionals deployed in providence.

Critics of moral necessity were not impressed. One set of critics claimed that, despite the denials, moral necessity was simply causal necessity with a new name. If moral motives or practical judgment made the choice of the will truly unavoidable, then those predetermining conditions were in fact necessitating causes. Another set of critics reiterated the criticism which led earlier figures to reject such a view, specifically: if moral motives or practical judgments could only morally necessitate choice, God's knowledge of counterfactuals of freedom would be insufficiently grounded.²⁴ In the remainder of this paper I will trace out these main lines of criticism raised by these critics as well as some of the responses offered by moral necessitarians.

IV. Retaining freedom/avoiding metaphysical bruteness

Ruiz de Montoya and Granado adopted the terminology of "moral necessitation" and used it to give a general characterization of the relationship between last practical judgment and choice. Like the Thomists, Ruiz held that the will has a natural inclination to love the good, and thus to love objects of choice as they are presented *sub ratione boni*. As a result of the will's nature, it is metaphysically and physically impossible for it to choose something unless it is represented as a good in some measure.²⁵ From this natural inclination to the good springs an inclination toward, or a motives in favor of, various goods presented by the intellect, where the strength of the

Juan Sendín Calderón, OFM. *Opus posthumus aliquot tractatus theologicos in via Doct. Subt. Scoti*, Alcalá, 1699, p. 323, §3.

²⁴ There was a third set of critics addressing a set of issues I am leaving off to the side entirely. This set of critics took aim at the thesis, defended by some moral necessitarians, that moral necessity extends to God's action, most notably, to God's choice of which world to create. Since God is aware of all of the creative possibilities, and since he is also morally necessitated to choose the best, then the actual world is the best world, and God's choice of it was unavoidable. This raised the obvious objections. But we will have to leave this important controversy to the side here.

²⁵Diego Ruiz de Montoya, 1631, pp.162b-163a.

inclination or motive is proportional to the degree of good represented to be in the object. While it is physically impossible for the will to act contrary to its natural love for the good, it is not physically impossible for the will to choose in accordance with a weaker motive:

If the will were to incline towards an operation through deliberation, while its dominion over its activity remains intact, it would retain the physical capacity to act contrary to its inclination.²⁶

And this physical power to resist any inclination is grounded for Ruiz in the fact that the will cannot be necessitated by finite goods:

Considering the object and the cognition of it, the will is not caught up as [it would be] in a clear vision of the infinite good [i.e., God], but rather it can, if it wills, change the soul to the consideration of unsuitable facets of this act or of some good facets of omitting this act or some good facets of some contrary act.²⁷

Yet despite the fact that the will has this physical power to reject any motive, in fact the will never chooses contrary to motives which are especially strong. The moral necessitarians provide numerous examples to emphasize this point. If a starving man is shown the finest food and there are no obstacles to eating it, he will eat.²⁸ If God were to reveal to a pious man that reciting one Ave Maria would lead to the conversion of all of humanity, the man would do it.²⁹ If a man is sane and content, he will do whatever is necessary to save his life when it is endangered.³⁰ If a poor man is offered great riches at no expense to him, he will do what he needs to do to obtain it.³¹ If a mother is sane and knows that available medicine will cure her child, she will

²⁶ *Ibid.* p.163a.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.162a.

²⁸ Ruiz de Montoya, *Commentaria ac disputationes in primam partem S. Thomae: de scientia, ideis, de veritate ac vite Dei.*, 1629, p.607a.

²⁹ Diego Granado, *Commentarii in primam partem Summae Theologicae S. Thomae*, Pont-a-Mousson, 1624, pp.377b-378a.

³⁰ Ruiz de Montoya, 1629, 835b; Bernardo Aldrete SJ, *Commentariorum ac Disputationum in tertiam partem S. Thomae de mysterio Incarnationis Verbi Divini*, Lyon 1652, Volume 1, p.3a.

³¹ Ruiz de Montoya, 1631, 111b.

administer it.³² The Pope has the power to deny the decrees of all of his predecessors, but will not do so. A virtuous man can strip naked and run around in the street, but he will not.³³ And so on.

Such actions will infallibly be performed (or resisted as the case may be) under such circumstances even though, given the nature of the will, it is physically possible for the will to refrain (or act). It's physically possible for the virtuous man to strip naked and run in the street; he may sometimes even be tempted to do it. But, as a matter of fact, the truly virtuous man will not in fact do it. What is important here is that for Ruiz and Granado, a will that is morally necessitated in the choice of A still retains the power to do non-A:

Something which is necessary simpliciter is diametrically opposed to liberty, because it wholly excludes the possibility of its opposite. On the contrary, moral necessity leaves the absolute possibility of the opposite untouched, and thus liberty is safeguarded.³⁴

And yet while choosing the perceived lesser good is still in the power of the will, the choice of the lesser good never occurs,

For this is the essence of moral infallibility that the will is able to avoid this [act] but as a matter of fact never does.³⁵

Those things which are morally necessary have this condition, that although they can fail to exist, these very things are always future, for if some one of these things were not to be, they would not, by this very fact, be morally necessary but instead indifferent, i.e., morally free.³⁶

Moral necessitarians were insistent that this necessitation did not render the will merely passive.

Moral necessitation works not by having the will “overpowered” by the intellect or by motives, but by the will exercising its power of loving and desiring:

So [the critic charges], moral necessity is given when the power of the will is disabled, conquered, or seized efficaciously . . . by an object or by a strong intense habit. I respond that moral necessity does not happen in only this way for there is another more perfect and infallible way, namely, when the power is strengthened more to its object which is cognized and loved . . . when the will is moved, while presiding over its operations fully

³²*Ibid.*, 158b.

³³ The last two examples are from Jeronimo de Sousa, *Futurorum contingentium polysophia seclusis decretis omnibus et scientia media ad mentem Doctoris Subtilis*, Paris 1680, p.27.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 111b.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 116a.

³⁶Granado, 430.

and by a peaceful dominion, out of the most forceful love of the highest good, so that it would infallibly choose those goods which agree better with the highest good.³⁷

Critics replied that despite the talk of a new modality, moral necessitarianism was causal compatibilism dressed up in new garb. For them, the attempt to introduce a new weaker modality was an utter failure. To see why, it is first important to see how moral necessity was formally characterized. By the 1640's defenders of moral necessity had developed a characterization, if not a semantics, for the varieties of necessity they acknowledged. The following characterization from Sebastian Izquierdo, was fairly standard,

Thus, a subject has a metaphysical necessity to act when . . . if it failed to happen, two contradictories would be given, which is certainly repugnant. Something is physically necessary, however, when it could not fail to happen naturally and without a miracle, even if it could happen miraculously. Thus, finally, something is morally necessary when, by way of inclination, that which usually, or always, or almost always is accustomed to occur, cannot fail to happen, even if it can fail absolutely or in light of a law of nature.³⁸

Izquierdo goes on to claim that within moral necessity there are three degrees, supreme, middle, and least, only the first of which is applicable in the case of willing and choosing the best. He characterizes this supreme variety as follows:

³⁷Ruiz de Montoya, 1630, p.114.

³⁸ Sebastian Izquierdo, *Opus theologicum iuxta atque philosophicum de Deo uno*, Volume 2, Tractatus X, disp.32, Q.3. Rome 1670, p.454. Similar passages seem to abound in later defenders of this view. Here is one from Leonardo de Peñafiel: "In things and in objects there exist many necessities concerning existence or essence. The first is called Moral, and this occurs when a thing occurs always or almost always in the same manner. But this necessity does not exclude Physical and Metaphysical contingency: not Physical because the thing is able to happen otherwise Physically; not Metaphysically because of the fact that if some other thing would happen, a contradiction does not follow. The second necessity is Physical, which excludes Moral contingency because out of the nature of the thing it exists as it does, since it cannot naturally happen otherwise since the thing not have the Physical power to the opposite effect; for example, when fire is applied to a combustible patient and it does not burn, it is a miracle, and thus it cannot happen otherwise naturally. But this necessity does not exclude Metaphysical contingency because if combustion did not occur a contradiction would not follow. The third necessity is Metaphysical, which excludes all contingency, Moral and Physical, because it is impossible that a contradiction ever occur, and the Physical power for this to occur cannot be given, and this is the highest of all necessities." *Tractatus et disputationes in primam partem D. Thomae: De deo uno et trino*, Volume 1, 1663, p.522a. The earliest characterization of this sort I have found comes from Melchior Fürster's *Disputationes de voluntate Dei*, Valencia, 1650, Disp. III, c.1, prima pars.

. . . it is supreme when the subject itself, in this circumstance, is necessitated to the act such that when situated with the same conditions and things, it never happens without the act occurring.³⁹

So, where A is some event or state of affairs, we can say that A is metaphysically necessary if A's failure to occur entails a contradiction. A is physically necessary, if A will occur unless it is prevented by a miracle. A is morally necessary (in the supreme variety, i.e., when applicable to the choice of the best) when (i) the will is inclined towards A, (ii) that will is inclined towards A counterfactually implies that A is willed, and (iii) it is metaphysically and physically possible that not-A.

Critics of the view argued that insofar as moral necessity made the outcome unavoidable it differed from physical necessity in name only. The Jesuit Felipe Aranda characterizes the difficulty as follows,

Either the conjunction with the actual effect is of the essence of moral predetermination or it is not. If it is, then this moral predetermination has no power to be separated from the effect. . . . If it is not, then moral predetermination would retain its essence even if the moral predetermination were to lack the effect and be separated from it. But then in what way . . . would the effect be infallible?⁴⁰

Moral necessitarians are unified in their response to such arguments. That response: while the conjoining of the effect with the cause is infallible, that infallibility is accompanied by "a physical and metaphysical power not to be conjoined with it."⁴¹ The response, frustrating as it might be, is not incoherent. When the obtaining of one state of affairs, A, necessitates another state of affairs, B, whether morally or physically, B is inevitable. The difference is that in the case of physical necessity, the non-occurrence of B requires a miracle, and in the case of moral necessity, it does not.

Although the earliest defenders of moral necessitarianism denied that all acts were morally necessary, later defenders of the view found this inconsistent with the underlying

³⁹Izquierdo, p.454.

⁴⁰ *In primam partem de Deo sciente, praedestinante et auxiliante, seu Schola Scientiae mediae*, Saragossa, 1693, lib.3, disp.15, sect.3.

⁴¹ Caldéron, 1699, tract.5, disp.4, sec.3. See also Diego Granado, *In primam partem Summae Theologiae S. Thomae Commentarium*. Pont-a-Mousson, 1624, p.346.

motivations for the view. Ruiz, Granado, and their followers were willing to admit, as their examples show, that there are cases in which motives can morally necessitate the will, while leaving the act of the will physically contingent. But they did not think that *every* choice of the will was morally necessitated. Moral necessitation of the will occurs only in cases like those noted above, viz., cases in which one motive is overwhelmingly stronger than its competitors. In cases where the motives for the available courses of action are of roughly equal strength, Ruiz and Granado side with their Jesuits brothers in endorsing an active indifference on the part of the will that allows choosing any of the roughly equivalent motives.⁴²

The later moral necessitarians are insistent that moral necessity applies to all instances of free choice. One of the most skilled defenders of this view is the French Franciscan Jeronimo de Sousa. Like Ruiz and Granado, Sousa argues that moral necessity governs choice in the will and that it is weaker than physical and metaphysical necessity.⁴³ But unlike Ruiz and Granado, Sousa claims that any time one object of choice is represented as being better than the others, there is a moral necessity to choose that object,

When the will is in equilibrium, for example, when out of the all the connected features of the case it is neither inclined toward nor averse to some food, the smallest reason or circumstance would suffice for necessitating it and luring it to embrace one part of the contradiction [i.e., one of the alternatives]. . . . You object that in this case this meager amount of goodness in the object certainly suffices to move and determine the will, but it does not seem to be proven from this fact that it will be necessitated. I respond: By this very fact that some object efficaciously moves the will it necessitates it morally.⁴⁴

Furthermore, Sousa claims that there is a moral necessitation in every choice of the will,

You ask . . . whether the will, whenever it acts, always acts in a morally necessitated way. . . . I respond affirmatively, for this necessarily agrees with the will; just as it is necessary that the will have the good for its motive object when it operates, for this good both lures and moves and, and also predetermines and necessitates it.⁴⁵

⁴²Ruiz de Montoya, 1629, pp.771-86. In this way, Ruiz and Granado should be viewed as less than fully committed to NASP. However, as we will say, later moral necessitarians will deny the possibility of choice from such indifference.

⁴³See especially, Sousa, pp.35-6.

⁴⁴Sousa, *Ibid.*, p.31.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*,p.29.

Even in those cases in which we believe ourselves to be in equilibrium with respect to two or more choices, Sousa claims we are simply mistaken:

You say that experience shows that when the will is posited in equilibrium, because it has no greater propensity for one part than another, and yet it embraces one of the two, without any efficaciousness on the part of the object, but rather determining itself, because it wills and not because it is determined or enticed or invited by the object; therefore, it does not operate with moral predetermination in all cases. I respond that even in those cases of [so-called] equilibrium, the will operates by being morally necessitated. For if we do not experience any great force or efficaciousness in the enticing or attraction of the object, it is because the force is not great absolutely in itself; still it remains the case that it is great with respect to the state and disposition of the will excited at that time which is sufficient for it to be morally necessitated.⁴⁶

Sousa presents a variety of arguments for the view, all of them drawing their inspiration from a commitment to anti-bruteness. Some of the arguments focus simply on the need for some sufficient explanation for choice. In other cases, Sousa presents an argument with a Davidsonian ring. The text I have in mind goes as follows,

You object: the limited good in the object suffices so far as to move and determine the will, but it this does not seem to prove that the object necessitates the will. I respond: From the fact that a certain object efficaciously moves the will, it follows that it necessitates it morally. . . . This is proven from the fact that no object would move the will efficaciously unless (a) that object would move the will to the effect and (b) from this motion, the act always follows. But the effect is only morally necessary because the act is taken always to follow even though it can fail to follow. Thus, to move efficaciously and to necessitate morally are the same thing. Thus, neither in the aforementioned case nor in any other is any will able to operate unless it is necessitated morally.⁴⁷

In less charitable moments one might think that Sousa is simply confused about what it means for a condition to be sufficient. That is, he might simply be arguing that if a volition, V, can occur when the will is structured in a particular way, S, then that structure of the will is sufficient for V. But if S is sufficient for V, then V obtains when S does. If that is the argument, Sousa is confused.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, p.29.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p.31.

But I think that he rather has something else in mind—an argument that would be quite unsurprising in the mouth of someone who affirms NASP. The argument is that for an object of choice, i.e., something judged to be good, to count as an explanation for an action, it must be a sufficient condition for the occurrence of that action. If it isn't, then that judgment cannot explain the action since the occurrence of the judgment could have obtained without the volition occurring. This sort of argument shows the robust influence of the metaphysical anti-bruteness sentiments of the moral necessitarians. But it makes equally clear that moral necessitarians were well aware of the looming dangers of compatibilism⁴⁸.

V. Truthmaking and avoiding semantic bruteness

The concern to avoid semantic bruteness was long used by Thomists against defenders of middle knowledge. According to defenders of middle knowledge, there was nothing to make counterfactuals of freedom true, and thus nothing in virtue of which God could know them. Defenders of middle knowledge returned the favor by arguing that truthmakers for counterfactuals of human choice make freedom impossible. Whatever suffices to make it true that, say, Peter will deny Christ when challenged by the crowd, suffices to render Peter's choice unfree. Leibniz was well-aware of the concerns:

Here is what an opponent will say: . . . it must be the case that the foreknowledge of God has its foundation in the nature of things, and this foundation, making truth determinate, will prevent it from being contingent and free. It is this difficulty which has caused two parties to spring up: the predeterminators and the supporters of middle knowledge. . . . the principal objection [to this latter view] is aimed at the foundation of the knowledge. For what foundation can God have for seeing what the people of Keilah would do?⁴⁹

⁴⁸ The “looming danger” language may seem to be tendentious. However, Christian in this period were well aware of the worries that arise on compatibilism, most notably the problem of evil. I discuss this in greater detail in “Leibniz on Spontaneity” in *Leibniz: Nature and Freedom*, Jan Cover and Donald Rutherford, editors, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004.

⁴⁹ *T* §38-41 G VI 124-5. We need to be a bit cautious here, realizing that by “foreknowledge” here Leibniz means to refer to all sorts of knowledge that God has concerning the future, including conditional future contingents or counterfactuals for freedom.

As we saw, numerous critics, including Suarez and Bellarmine, made the argument that knowledge of the practical judgment or moral motives was insufficient to ground divine knowledge of the sort necessary for providential control. These criticisms were revived with vigor when moral necessitarians attempted to invoke moral necessity to provide such grounds. There were two species of this argument generally raised against the moral necessitarians. Both species hold that the fundamental problem is that the conditions which morally necessitate a certain act, since they allow the possibility that the act not occur, fail to make counterfactuals of freedom true in a way that suffices for orthodox purposes. Some argue that the problem is that such grounds provide God with a measure of certitude too weak for providential purposes. Others argue that such grounds leave God liable to the possibility of believing in error.

Let's consider the first. Most theologians acknowledged a rough parallel between types of necessity and degrees of certainty. That is, just as there is metaphysical, physical, and moral necessity, there are metaphysical, physical, and moral degrees of certainty. Of course, divine knowledge carried a certainty that is nothing short of metaphysical. And this is where the problem lies. The argument, here from the Jesuit Gaspar de Ribadeneira, is as follows,

Moral predetermination is metaphysically separable from our free consent, even though it is morally inseparable. Thus, it is not a ground of the divine metaphysical certainty concerning the existence of this consent, even when such predetermination is in fact given.⁵⁰

Moral necessitarians replied by arguing that the degree of certainty and the modal status of the object of knowledge are quite independent. Just as God can have metaphysically certain foreknowledge concerning contingent future states, so he could have metaphysically certain knowledge of these contingent conditionals.⁵¹ Sousa puts the point as follows,

⁵⁰ Gaspar de Ribadeneira, *Tractatus de praedestinatione sanctorum et reprobatione impiorum in primam partem sancti Thomae quaest. 22. 23. et 24*, 1652, p.393. The same argument can be found in Zumel, 1609, p. 211, Peñafiel, 1663, pp.527-8, Izquierdo, 1670, p.608, Diego de Alarcon, *Prima pars theologiae scholasticae*, Lyon, 1633, p.139.

⁵¹ Zumel, not a defender of moral necessitarianism, presents this reply on their behalf in 1609, p.211.

It is metaphysically infallible that the morally predetermined will would elicit the morally necessary volition, thus it is metaphysically infallible that the morally predetermined will have the volition which it has the metaphysical power not to have. Thus it is metaphysically infallible that the morally predetermined will have the volition with no repugnance, i.e., with a metaphysical power, to the opposite. Thus it is metaphysically infallible that the morally predetermined will will consent freely. All of these consequences seem evident to me . . .⁵²

It is interesting to note that Leibniz echoes very similar sentiments,

Therefore since God is free from necessity in choosing the highest actual good, certainly man will be free from necessity in choosing the apparent good, having been created in the image of God, granted that he would choose that which appears best. But these things in no way interfere with *certainty*. Therefore one must counteract the sentiments of Hobbes and Wycliff saying that nothing is possible except what occurs in fact, i.e., everything is necessary. If they had said that everything is *certain* and *infallible*, they would have spoken correctly . . .⁵³

Despite these worries, moral necessitarians were quite well aware of the fact that their view provided them with distinct advantages, especially against defenders of middle knowledge. On that view, counterfactuals of freedom are wholly ungrounded, a fact which prompts Ruiz and others to complain that middle knowledge lacks something important. Thus Ruiz, who does not deny the possibility of middle knowledge, argues that knowledge arising from moral necessity is still essential for God since,

. . . there are truths which are known through this (moral necessity) which are not known through middle knowledge, for the following truths are quite different: (1) “Peter, with the impulse of these motives and circumstances, will now elicit this act,” and (2) “Out of the force of such and such motives and circumstances it can be infallibly inferred that Peter would elicit such and such an act at such and such a

⁵² Sousa, 1680, p.58. The same point is pressed by others as well. For example, see Juan Sendín Calderón, 1699, p.323: “Between the antecedent and the consequent (of the counterfactual of freedom), there is an inference which is infallible with a moral infallibility and the knowledge of this inference is certain with a metaphysical certainty. . . The proposition ‘If the created will were left without efficacious grace and confronted with a grave temptation, it would consent’ is a proposition which is infallible with a metaphysical infallibility. Likewise with the following proposition: ‘If a just man were left without special grace, he will commit some venial sin or other because there are many occasions for sinning and the fragility of man is very great’; but between the grave temptation and the consent there exists a moral connection, and similarly between the various occasions for sinning in this life and venial sin there exists a moral connection; thus it is clear that the connection is infallible with a moral infallibility, and still the certainty of such a connection is metaphysical.” See also Ruiz, 1629, 834-7.

⁵³ Grua, pp.299-300. See also AG102, NE175, Grua, p. 298, T §310 G VI 300, T: *Reflections on King* 418.

time.” However, the difference consists in the fact that the first proposition does not affirm any connection but only a determinate coexistence. But in the other proposition a connection is affirmed . . . Thus if God were to be enabled only by middle knowledge, without this infallible knowledge . . . he would lack cognition of another sort of truth.⁵⁴

The second objection—that such grounds left God liable to error—was voiced repeatedly by Thomists. For Thomists, the only possible grounds for divine certainty concerning human actions was divine premotion. Anything less left God’s knowledge dependent on created things in ways that not only threatened divine impassibility, but also threatened essential divine omniscience since it seemed to leave God liable to error.⁵⁵ Moral necessitarians again simply denied the charge, arguing that this only follows if God might get things wrong concerning the obtaining of contingent states of affairs. But there is simply no reason to accept this. The object known can be contingent, and still knowledge concerning the object is not liable to falsity. Ruiz remarks,

The omission of the infallible act is at the same time physically compossible with knowledge of the highest infallibility. This is clear and proven by a general distinction by which divine cognition of the future in its causes is distinguished from divine cognition of the future in itself, with the result that although the future could go differently than God knows it will go in its causes, this does not support the possibility of a false cognition precisely because God knows that future precisely as it is contained in its causes.⁵⁶

Before closing this section let me make two final points that are especially relevant for those who are interested in the connections between Leibniz and the moral necessitarians. First, how did moral necessitarians classify divine knowledge of counterfactuals of creaturely freedom? Theologians of the period standardly partitioned divine knowledge into three categories: knowledge of simple intelligence, knowledge of vision, and middle knowledge. Knowledge of vision concerns knowledge of those contingent propositions made true by the divine will. Knowledge of simple intelligence concerns necessary propositions made true independent of facts about the divine will. Middle knowledge is knowledge of contingent truths

⁵⁴ Ruiz de Montoya, 1629, p.828.

⁵⁵ Zumel, 1609, p.211.

⁵⁶ Ruiz de Montoya, 1629, p.838.

which are made true independent of facts about the divine will. Moral necessitarians are united in holding that counterfactuals of human freedom belong under knowledge of simple intelligence.⁵⁷ This is notable since it distinguishes them from their two primary competitors, Thomists and Jesuits, who classified these conditionals under knowledge of vision and middle knowledge respectively. Why did they not regard them as items of middle knowledge? The reason appears to be that, by their lights, conditionals fall under middle knowledge only when the connection between antecedent and consequent is brute. Since the truth of counterfactuals of freedom are in fact grounded in the moral necessitation, they belong under simple intelligence along with physically and metaphysically necessary conditionals. It is noteworthy that Leibniz's favored position is to put these conditionals under knowledge of simple intelligence.⁵⁸

Second, Moral necessitarians frequently described their view as one according to which God knows future free actions "in their causes." But we need to interpret this cautiously. An incautious reading would lead one to think that this phrase signals an endorsement of the compatibility of freedom and efficient causal determinism. But this is obviously not what the moral necessitarians are asserting. In one of Ruiz's disputations on whether or not God knows with certainty the morally infallible connection in counterfactuals of freedom, one section is entitled, "Knowledge of the infallible connection is knowledge of the future not as it is in itself, but as it is contained in its causes."⁵⁹ Does this amount to ordinary efficient causal compatibilism? Clearly not since Ruiz goes on to further describe knowledge in causes in terms of moral infallibility,

. . . moral infallibility understood in its essence consists in this: that free assent is inferred out of this will, posited under such and such motives, causes, and circumstances, so that such an act is never, as a matter of fact, omitted, although absolutely and physically it is possible that it is omitted, even in the composed sense, and with all facts beings taken into account. . . . But it always happens that the act is elicited while retaining the power for not eliciting it.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Caldéron, 324, Ruiz 1629, 841, et al.

⁵⁸ *Causa Dei* §§14-17

⁵⁹ Ruiz de Montayo, 1629, p.833.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

This, by the way, seems to mirror quite closely Leibniz own discussion about this matter, as can be seen in the following text from the *Theodicy*,

Nor does, finally, the *predisposition of the world*, that is, the various series of causes, involve a prejudice to freedom. For nothing ever happens for which the reason could not be given, nor do cases of indifference of equilibrium ever occur. . . . On the contrary, there are always, in the efficient cause and in the concurring causes, certain preparations . . . [or] predeterminations. It must, however, be stated that these determinations are only inclining, not necessitating, so that a certain indifference or contingency always remains intact. The passion or appetite in us is never found to be so strong that our action follows from it with necessity.⁶¹

VII. Closing reflections on Leibniz and moral necessity

Although Leibniz's earliest use of "moral necessity" in an action theoretic sense does not occur until 1702, the fundamental features of the view are in place for much earlier.⁶² As we have seen, there would be good reason to link Leibniz to the moral necessitarian tradition even if he stuck with his language of "inclination without necessitation" without ever adopting the phrase "moral necessity." It is clear that the underlying motivations for moral necessitarianism, i.e., our two anti-bruteness principles, are shared by Leibniz. The metaphysical anti-bruteness principle is, for Leibniz, just the Principle of Sufficient Reason. The semantic anti-bruteness principle used in this way is in place by 1685 at

⁶¹ *T: Causa Dei* §105 G VI 454. See also *T* §367 G VI 333: "But provided (1) that it is understood that necessity and possibility, taken metaphysically and strictly, depend solely on this question: whether the object in itself, or that which is opposed to it implies a contradiction or not; and (2) that one takes into account that contingency is consistent with the inclinations, or reasons which contribute toward causing determination by the will; provided (3) that one also knows how to distinguish between necessity and determination or certainty, i.e., between metaphysical necessity, which admits of no choice, presenting only one single object as possible, and moral necessity, which constrains the wisest to choose the best; finally, provided (4) that one is free of the chimera of complete indifference, which can only be found in the books of philosophers, and on paper (for they cannot even conceive the notion in their heads, or prove its reality by an example in things) one will easily escape from a labyrinth. . . . A Thomist and even a wise Jansenist will content himself with certain determination, without going on to necessity. . . . A wise Molinist will be content with an indifference opposed to necessity, but such as will not exclude prevalent inclinations. Similar remarks can be found at *Grua*, p.290, and *T* §361 G VI 329.

⁶² The earliest reference can be found at *G* II 29-38.

least.⁶³ I have no good hypothesis about what explains Leibniz's appropriation of the term in 1702. He sustains its use from that point forward.

Although the connections between Leibniz and the moral necessitarians are suggestive, the details need to be worked out with care. Does Leibniz transform the concept in some way that makes it fundamentally different from the concept endorsed by earlier moral necessitarians? How does this change our understanding of Leibniz's views on freedom, and on divine providence? And further, is the concept of moral necessity itself coherent (that is, coherently distinguishable from supposedly stronger senses of necessity)? These questions now await closer scrutiny.⁶⁴

⁶³ See, for example, *Discourse on Metaphysics* §8 (AG 40-1).

⁶⁴ Research support for this paper was provided by the Center for Philosophy of Religion at the University of Notre Dame as well as from the American Philosophical Society. I am grateful to Sven Knebel for help in navigating through the maze of seventeenth century scholasticism, and to Jack Davidson for comments on an earlier draft of this work.